

2 Samuel 6

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[0 : 0 0] I have a friend who recently wrote a book, or at least he edited a book, dealing with the influence and the effects of some evangelical leaders in the 20th century, one in particular in Britain. And as with many of these things, it wasn't as well received in every quarter of the evangelical community, and some of the reviews were negative.

Interesting, Carl Truman wrote a review of some of the reviews. The certain irony, the title of his blog was The Sin of Uzza, and the point was that we do tend to make heroes of people, and when we have these heroes, we tend to put them on such pedestals that to criticize them is deemed as being equivalent to The Sin of Uzza, touching the Ark of the Lord. We like our heroes to be flawless, or as close to flawless as is possible. We have a plethora of superhero movies out at the moment, the most recent being Man of Steel. The issue there being that kryptonite is the one flaw, the one weakness that Superman cannot deal with, but the great thing is that he overcomes these things, and he is victorious in the end. And that's how we like to see our Christian heroes in the Christian church. But Truman identifies two comments that were made about an evangelical leader, one of which was that one person said that he was the most humble man they had ever met, and another one said he was an egoist who would not tolerate any contradiction to his will. And the question then is, which of these is true? The fact is, probably both of them are true, because unlike the superheroes of fiction, the real heroes of the faith are flawed human beings who have, depending on when you meet them and which perspective you see them or which day you meet them on, can exhibit a variety of traits. And the Bible, unlike us, is much more realistic. When you read the pictures depicted in Scripture of the great heroes of the faith, David is one of the greatest heroes of the faith, a man after God's own heart is how God Himself describes David. Our heroes have feet of clay, and we cannot look to them. But we can get a realistic picture of them, and we can learn something from them as they did. We can look at them and say, they are better than me. It's possible for us to esteem one another better than ourselves, whilst at the same time being realistic about what we're looking at.

David was a poet. We've been singing some of his psalms, but he was also most definitely an alpha male. He was a work in progress. He was not perfect. Now, we're going to look at 2 Samuel, the second reading we did, chapter 6, in that context. It's about David's learning process and some of the issues surrounding it that led to his betterment, his development, but even at the end still lacking perfection. There's a lot in this chapter. The more I read it, the more I realized that one was only going to scratch the surface. It's got a great many incidents, and we can touch on them as they relate to the life of David. David, the Ark of the Covenant had been treated superstitiously by the people of Israel. It had then been captured by the Philistines, who didn't have a very good relationship with it. They were struck down with illnesses, and they sent it back to Israel.

They did certain things to check that it was God that had, in fact, done these things to them. So, 20 years later, it's been basically marginalized throughout most of Samuel's judgeship and Saul's kingship, and now David is established. He has been king at Hebron for seven years. He is now fully king of Israel, and the final establishing of his kingdom would be to bring the Ark of the Covenant, the symbol of God's blessing, the symbol of God's presence, and symbolically then of Christ's presence with the church, to the city of David, the place he has set up as his throne. And that would basically be the final piece in the jigsaw of establishing David's kingdom.

So, he decides it's common sense just to bring that the symbol of God's presence should be in the same place as the king himself. Now, the chapter breaks down into two parallel parts, and each of them have similar features. There's the decision, the plan, and the action taken to bring the Ark of the Covenant from where it currently is to Jerusalem. There's a celebration going on at the same time, and there's a judgment that takes place at the end of each section.

[5 : 26] The two sections teach us different things about David, about how we should react to God, and how we should learn and use his word and use his means. The two things are linked, the two parts are linked together by the incident with Obed-Edom, what happens when the Ark is placed there. So, overall, the chapter is about spiritual growth, spiritual learning, and moving forward in the faith.

So, looking at the first attempt that David made to bring the Ark up. Now, in the previous chapter, when David is establishing his kingdom, he goes to God and asks specific details, not only about whether he should go up and subdue the Philistines, but how he should do it. So, God is very closely involved in that action. And one of the first significant thing here is that there's no mention of David consulting with God. Now, David had the law of Moses. He had Nathan the prophet and Abiathar with the Urim and Thumm. He had various ways in which he could have consulted God and found out what he wanted to do. But he doesn't do that. He does what is common sense. He just creates a means of getting the Ark from the house of Abinadab to the city of Jerusalem, to the tent that David has set up for it.

No doubt it was a Rolls-Royce of carts, a very good brand new cart with oxen, and they took the Ark, placed it on it, and they made the procession. 30,000 people approximately there. That's approximately the same number of people as attended Rock Ness recently, and probably what Aberdeen could expect on a good day at Pataudry.

So, it's a large crowd celebrating this movement. Everything goes well, common sense. You have one person at the front guiding the oxen, one person at the back to make sure that everything's going fine. And everything's moving forward. They're going to get to Jerusalem until the oxen stumble.

And Uzzah stretches forth a very natural act to stop the Ark from falling off the cart. Now, maybe there was a bad design in the cart if it was actually in danger of falling off with an oxen stumbling, but nonetheless, a very natural reaction. And when I read that, I have to, when I put myself in that position, I think, would I actually have done anything differently? It's just, you know, oh!

[7 : 58] But God would not tolerate this. He touched the Ark, which no one was supposed to do. Ignorance is no excuse. They obviously had not been looking at the law, but here's what, that's what happened.

Why did things go wrong? Well, we already said, David didn't consult God as to how they should do it. So, where did he get the idea that this would be a proper way of bringing an Ark, the Ark of the Covenant, to Jerusalem? Well, we read 1 Samuel chapter 6. And in 1 Samuel chapter 6, quite clearly, new cart, Ark placed on the cart, oxen, send the Ark off. The Philistines did exactly that. Now, the Philistines represent the world, the worldly world, as a previous minister of this congregation, I was a student, Hector Cameron was the minister here, and he always used to refer to the worldly world. We see here the influence of the world very clearly on the actions of the House of Israel. This is not to say that we don't learn anything from the world, but when we set aside the means that God has given us and take on the common sense attitudes of the world, we're heading for trouble. This was not what God had said should happen, and in fact, God had said very clearly what should happen. In the book of Numbers, chapter 4, verses 4 to 6, and then verse 15. So, 4 to 6, this is the work of the Kohathites in the tent of meeting, the care of the most holy things. When the camp is to move, Aaron and his sons are to go in and take down the shielding curtain and cover the ark of the testimony with it. Then they are to cover this with the hides of sea cows, spread a cloth of solid blue over that, and put the poles in place.

After Aaron and his sons have finished covering the holy furnishings and all the holy articles, when the camp is ready to move, the Kohathites are to come to do the carrying. They must not touch the holy things or they will die. The Kohathites are to carry those things that are in the tent of meeting. So, only the children of the high priest, of Aaron, the Aaronites, could see the ark of the covenant. They could cover it. They even had to put the poles into place, the means by which the ark was to be covered, to carry it. The Kohathites who were charged with carrying it could only touch the poles, and they couldn't look or touch the ark itself, or they would die. So, God had given very specific instructions, which David had access to, but he had chosen to follow common sense, what he had already seen being done. Now, we can sympathize because the Philistines had lifted the ark, put it in the cart, and it had come up to Beth Shemesh. Nothing had happened to anyone at that point. There was what happened to the people of Beth Shemesh when they looked inside the ark. So, there were hints there that things were not as they should be. So, the question here is then not so

much why did Uzzah die, but why did Uzzah die? After all, to put the thing, the ark onto the cart, various people have had to touch it. There's no mention of the poles or anything else at this point. [11 : 38] Anyone at that point could have been killed, and I think we can't be definite about these things, but we can identify certain differences between what happened here and what happened in the case of the Philistines. The world does encroach into the church. It has throughout history. We have not managed to be pure or perfect or keeping God's laws. We're always influenced by the culture that surrounds us, but we should be making an effort to ensure that the boundaries are set in such a way that we do not compromise what God has told us, that we do, in fact, search the Word to see that what we are doing is right and set the boundaries that way, which so often we, like David, do not do.

But God is merciful, and we see that here. The world has defined how David was to take the ark up to Kiriath-Jarim, and as long as he was doing what the Philistines did, God in His mercy allows that to happen. No doubt they would have got to Jerusalem if the oxen hadn't stumbled, but the oxen stumbling was God's way of teaching a lesson. We compare what the Philistines did. The Philistines set the whole thing up in such a way that it should not have actually got to Beth Shemesh, a new cart, but two oxen that have just given birth, and you take the calves away, and then you set them. What does a mother or a cow do? It'll try and get to its calf, because that's where it's attracted to.

But the Philistines did nothing to intervene. If the thing, if the oxen had stumbled, that would be a sign for them that this wasn't God. So they weren't going to, so they let it go. Israel, who should have known better when the oxen stumble, do not trust to God. They don't even test, as the Philistines did, to let God take care of it. They intervene, and I have every sympathy for Utsa. I would probably have done the same thing. Utsa's judgment was a temporal judgment, but it was a judgment because he went beyond what even the world had done. He did not trust God. He didn't even test God. He didn't rely on God to fulfill what God could do by taking the ark to Jerusalem. And then we have to ask, do we see in our own age, do we see in our own church, do we see in our own evangelical community encroachments of the world in such ways that detract from the perfection that God would seek us to strive towards? Recently, the government has, law has now been passed in the Westminster

Parliament, whereby in England and Wales, same-sex marriages are going to be law. Things are coming in Scotland as well. But surveys recently, I read this this week, I couldn't find, I can't remember where I saw it, but there's a survey which more and more evangelicals are shifting to actually believe that same-sex marriage is an acceptable mode of life. And so you can see the erosion that the world creates in the church. I saw a cartoon recently as well, which struck home to me because of things I see. And it was, basically, there was a cartoon of two kids talking to one another, and it just simply said, our grandparents called it the Sabbath, our parents called it the Sunday, we call it the weekend.

And so you can see, and of course, you can't blame one generation because generations do not suddenly change. The process starts with the grandparents and the erosion leads to the outcome over time.

[15 : 46] But we mustn't overcompensate. There is a balance. We don't want to become ultra-conservative, whereby we fall off the knife edge the other way and breach God's laws by becoming too legalistic. It is an incredibly difficult thing to follow God's Word exactly, and we can't, which is why we are not perfect. So, Uzzah dies, and he dies for a good reason. The superficial reason, or the clear reason, is because he has done what God has commanded him not to do. How did he get to that position? Because the world defined the actions that they were taking. David's reactions, like so many of us, he's, one minute he's all full of jubilation, celebrating, and he's, instead of stopping, taking stock and saying, hmm, what did we do wrong? Why did this happen? He swings exactly that, 180 degrees, the opposite direction. Okay, I'm having nothing to do with this. That's dangerous. That's, firstly, anger. Anger at God for killing Uzzah, and then fear. Initial reaction when something goes wrong, our initial reaction is anger. It betrays the fallen nature that we have. To even be angry at God, we do that, or at least I do.

What is this? So, this, we could call this end of the story, the judgment on Uzzah. It's a temporal judgment. It says nothing about Uzzah's spiritual state. I don't know enough about Uzzah to say anything about that. Temporal judgments God has imposed upon his people, Moses being a key example.

But this is a severe mercy. Through this, David learns something. Once he stops, it takes time. It takes at least three months for him to figure things out. But in that three months, there's the interlude where the ark is placed in the hands or in the house of Obed-Edom. And Obed-Edom is blessed. So, God has spoken directly by an intervention in nature by directly killing Uzzah. God then speaks indirectly through circumstance, through the blessing that he gives to Obed-Edom. Quietly arranging that circumstance, he speaks to David through other people who tell David about what's happening with Obed-Edom. So, David finally gets the message, the ark is not the problem, because the ark is in the presence of Obed-Edom and he is being blessed. So, if the ark's not the problem and God was angry, there must have been something else going on here. And David reflects. And so, in the second attempt, the second half of the story, things are different. They're carried up by the priests, and I would guess that the poles are in place. There's no cart. It's all done properly. The success with the sacrifices, great celebrations, gifts given out to all the people, everyone's happy. David's actions are appropriate. He divests himself of his kingly robes and acts as one of the people before the ark, the presence of God. So, he's obviously read Numbers chapter 4 at this stage.

He shows us humility, but he shows another side of his character. He is an exuberant person. He is a man of great emotional integrity, you might say, and he bursts out in dancing. Now, there is no mention anywhere in the law about the transporting of the holy things that involves dancing, jumping. It's just an expression. It doesn't justify the church, as some people try to use this, that God's silence and allowing this, that David was right in doing this. He may have been. God's silence does not mean God's approval. We often operate on the definition of silence as acquiescence. That doesn't work with God. God's silence may be merciful and will only be tolerated for some time. There is a hint of impropriety, and he's dancing with this ephod, having stripped himself off. It's an open question. In the version in Chronicles, there is a hint that David was also wearing another garment.

[20 : 10] So, that may not be true. But everything then is in place. He's subdued the Philistines, he's established himself as the king, and the Davidic line is now set for being established. Or is it?

There is one problem, one fly in the ointment to the establishment of the Davidic line. And that comes in what we might loosely call a domestic that David then encounters when he goes home. He's been dancing about, and Michal, his first wife, sees him and she despises him in her heart. Now, I'm going to come out and say, I think Michal gets a really bad deal in everything I've read about commenting on her. It's just assumed that she was totally in the wrong here. Even a superficial look at the history of Michal does not, to my mind, support this. She is far from perfect. People, when they read the thing, the last verse about her being childless, assume this was God's judgment upon her directly by making her barren. I don't see anything in the story that necessitates that or even actually points to that as a reasonable explanation. Michal loved David. That's what it says in 1 Samuel 18. Now, she is unique.

Apparently, she is the only woman in the whole of the Old Testament of whom it is said that she loved a man. She loved David, but she ended up being a pawn in power play. David and Saul thought this was great. She would be a snare to David, by which he meant he could ask a dowry price that would almost certainly get David killed. He asked this trivial dowry price of the foreskins of a hundred Philistines.

Now, to get that, David would have to enter into very close combat with them, and here his men go out. But the indication that this is a power play going on between David and Saul is that David then returns and says, 100 foreskins, here's 200, keep the change. She is the pawn in the middle, a political alliance between the line of Saul and the line of David. It's also significant that she sees him from a window.

Michal only appears as an actor in Samuel twice. In the first instance, and both of these instances involve a window. In the first case, she risks, I wouldn't say her life, but she certainly risks her well-being for David because Saul wants to kill David, and she covers for him, and she gets him out a window.

[22 : 59] So the last thing she sees of her husband is him leaving out a window to flee for his life from her father. When he left, she was his one and only wife. When he returned, Saul had given her to Paltiel as a wife. Paltiel obviously loved her because he goes, when the deal that David makes with Abner to accept Abner and to consolidate the kingdom through Abner to set aside Ish-bosheth, is that Abner must, and Ish-bosheth must return Michal to him as his wife. Again, a political action.

Now whilst David may have read Numbers 4 by this stage, he pretty obviously hadn't read Deuteronomy 17, verses 14 to 20.

The section is called the king. When you enter the land the Lord your God is giving you and have taken possession of it and settled in it, you say, let us make a king over us like all the nations around us. Be sure to appoint over you the king the Lord your God chooses. He must be from among your own brothers. When he takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for... oh, sorry. You are not to go by...he must not take many wives or his heart will be led astray. He must not accumulate large amounts of silver, and he must write for himself in a scroll a copy of this law taken from the priests who are the Levites. Now pretty obviously David hadn't done that. David, even more so than Saul. Saul had one wife, I think, and one concubine for all his faults. David by this stage had multiple wives. When she left, she was his only wife. When she returned, she was simply one of a number in a harem.

She wasn't stupid. The picture we get was of an intelligent woman. She could put two and two together. So, the cumulative effect of this. And when she sees him dancing and cavorting in front of the Ark of the Covenant, she had an understandable bitterness, and this was probably the last straw.

She is referred to as the daughter of Saul throughout this section. It doesn't justify her in her bitterness for all that was going on. She was focused on David rather than what was going on in the celebration of the bringing of the Ark of the Covenant. But that, perhaps she thought, oh no, not again. Because with her nut job of a father, it certainly couldn't be because she was criticizing David for having set aside his kingly robes because her father did more. He actually ran around naked with the sons of the prophets, prophesying. So, she wasn't in a position to compare her father's dignity with David at this point.

She might simply have seen David going in that direction. This was the final straw, and she despised him in her heart. The daughter of Saul, I don't think, refers to simply the fact that she had Saul's outlook. It refers to the fact that she was the representative of Saul's line. She was the fly in the ointment. She was the first wife of David, and any son that they had would have had a good claim claim to the throne. And David did not want to have...the way he responds to Michal here indicates that he had no intention of having a grandson of Saul creating a claim to the throne through the Davidic line. And God has said the throne has been taken away from the house of Saul, and this was the final judgment.

[26 : 26] It's the judgment on the house of Saul. We can't choose our families, and Michal, unfortunately, as the daughter of Saul is the representative here. God does not intervene directly, but what has happened is you have a woman who despises her husband and a husband who has no intentions of fathering a child that would run the risk of furthering Saul's line. And so, you have mutual consent, because apart from one case in history, there's one sexual intercourse is a necessary prerequisite to having children. So, they think she never had any children, and she had never had any children because she didn't want to have children with David, and David didn't want to have children with her.

Now, David's response here, he has grown, but there's still imperfections in both of them. This domestic indicates faults on both sides. Very rarely in human affairs is one person all right and the other person all wrong. But despite this mess, God's plans come to fruition. Through two wrong actions, with two people acting wrongly, God's right judgments occur. And we can learn from this. We can learn, take comfort that despite our failings, we are a work in progress. God is not finished with us, and He, if we are willing to learn from His Word, learn from our mistakes, go back to the Bible, will use us. We also learn that we should not be putting our heroes on pedestals. They are like us.

They're better than us, but they are like us. There is only one person that we can look to, to see how we should behave. And that is great David's greater son. He works out his purposes in us. He is the one true hero, the Lord Jesus Christ, in whom there was no imperfection, in whom he could say, the devil has nothing in me. He has fiery darts. There was nothing to ignite. He is the one who is building the church, and we are the bricks. But fortunately, these bricks can be shaped. They can be shaped more and more and made better. They can be shaped for a particular purpose. We are the unlikely material, as David was. It's a lifetime process. But if we look to Jesus as the one person and trust more and more and more in Him, we will be shaped and used for the furtherance of His kingdom and for His glory. So, we are surrounded by all these heroes in the Bible.

And there's only one hero, as I said, that we can really look to. So, just to finish, I would just appropriately finish with Hebrews chapter 12, verses 1 and 2. Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and the perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

And now, let us close by singing a psalm of praise to that great Savior, that great hero, that perfect being. If we sing Psalm 15, we'll sing the whole Psalm, a traditional version.

[30 : 18] We sing to the tune Grafenberg. Psalm 15, verse 1. Within thy tabernacle, Lord, who shall abide with thee? And in thy high and holy hill, who shall a dweller be? The man that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and as he thinketh in his heart, so doth he truth express. Who doth not slander with his tongue, nor to his friend doth hurt, nor yet against his neighbor doth take up an ill report, in whose eyes vile men are despised. But those that God do fear he honoureth, and changeth not, though to his hurt he swear. His coin puts not to usury, nor take reward will he against the guiltless. Who doth thus shall never move it be?

These words to God's praise. Amen. Psalm 15, verse 1.

Within thy tabernacle, Lord, who shall abide with thee? And in thy home, holy hill, who shall Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

[33 : 23] Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Amen. Thank you.